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ABSTRACT

This article describes the use of a Group Log to evaluate the personal growth experienced and group skills learned in group counseling in which the counselor-in-training writes a Group Log for each group experience. The evaluation criteria of the log are presented in terms of therapeutic forces and group dynamics observed, self-awareness recognized while being a group member, detected feelings and observed behaviors of other group members, and the means of enhancing the group's progress. The beneficial aspects to students writing these logs include the following: (1) using recognition and recall skills to assess the importance of behaviors related to effective group movement; (2) gaining insight through introspective thoughts relative to one's own involvement as a group member; (3) being conscious of the uniqueness of other members; and (4) developing potential leader interventions through relationship to recognized behaviors and sensed feelings. (Author)

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Group Counseling for Counselor Candidates: The Group Log

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Group Counseling for Counselor Canidates: The Group Log

It is generally recognized and accepted that counselor education programs, including group counseling courses, stress a combination of didactic and experiential training. While methods of teaching the cognitive content of a group counseling course are well established, methods of teaching personal growth experiences are more controversial (Banikiotes 1975 & Hutchins 1976). Recent literature reports that active participation in a group is gaining increased recognition and respect as a desirable and facilitative experience for the counselor-in-training (Maynard 1976, Ohlsen 1975 & Tate 1973).

The goals of active participation in a group are 1) to increase awareness of oneself as a total person, with emphasis on personal counselor traits and professional counseling performance, 2) to develop the ability to communicate the basic helping skills of warmth, accurate empathy, concreteness, and genuineness, 3) to develop awareness of the potential outcomes of group counseling, 4) to learn how to help others translate the desire to change into specific behavioral goals, and 5) to learn to help others facilitate commitment and shape steps leading to behavioral change. After comparing different types of group experiences, D'Augelli, Meyer, and Conter (1977) suggest that training should focus on learning specific skills and strategies as well as emphasize personal growth.

The purpose of this article is to share the means by which I assess the personal growth of the student. A critical ethical concern for pro-

grams that include personal growth experiences in their required curriculum is evaluation. Assessing personal growth is difficult and can easily become a subjective and unreliable process. Banikiotes (1975) suggests that the student's personal functioning be treated as an intervening variable that has an effect on the development of professional skills. I strongly concur with this thought. When a student joins a group to increase personal growth and develop cognitive skills, I suggest that the emphasis of evaluation should be on the student's ability to 1) recognize the therapeutic forces in the group, 2) be aware of his or her own behavior and its impact on others in the group, 3) develop empathic skills, 4) recognize group member behaviors that facilitate group movement, 5) assess effective leadership skills exhibited by the leader, and 6) recommend leader intervention skills that could have been facilitative.

In the Rider College Counselor Education program, the group counseling course is a critical part of a continuous theme of combining cognitive skill training with personal growth experiences. All students entering the program are informed of the self-involving personal growth theme. The group counseling course is taught and experienced from a single-model approach based primarily on the Ohlsen (1977) model. I find that this model provides a strong base for 1) teaching group leadership skills, 2) providing a stimulating setting from which helping skills are learned, 3) facilitating commitment to behavioral change, 4) providing a stimulating therapeutic atmosphere for personal growth and 5) serving as an effective model for use in the students' future as counselors.

While experiencing being a member of a counseling group, the student is able to utilize and receive the effects of helping skills from other group members. Also, the counselor-in-training, by being an actual member in an authentic group, is able to directly observe and experience the impact of the leader's skills. These skills can be observed for both modeling leader interventions and impact on the dynamics of the group's movement.

Group Log

A prime source of grade evaluation is the Group Log each student writes for each group counseling session he or she experiences throughout the duration of the group counseling course--usually 10 sessions at 75 minutes per session. The Group Log is designed to make the counselor-in-training recognize and recall critical behaviors and concepts observed and experienced during the session. The log allows me to assess the student's present abilities to recognize critical instances related to group movement, therapeutic forces, helping skills, and self-involving behaviors. Through feedback on the Group Log, I am able to reinforce present skills, to respond to critical instances not recognized by the student, and to suggest further depth of meaning to present levels of recognition and awareness.

I evaluate the Group Log on the following four criteria: 1) therapeutic forces and group dynamics observed, 2) self-awareness recognized while being a group member, 3) the detected feelings and behaviors in other group members, and 4) the means of enhancing group progress. Each criterion is given equal weight in the evaluation process.

Therapeutic Forces and Group Dynamics Observed. In this aspect of the log, the student must recall and give a brief description of the prime

therapeutic forces (specific positive and negative behaviors and patterns) that were observed and considered critical to group movement. An example taken from a portion of a log follows:

> "There seems to be a trend within the group of 'now that we have spoken, it is your turn next.' I feel this creates a negative force of expectations where some members such as George and I may be feeling a pressure to speak. This pressure may create resistance if there is little client readiness in the person being focused upon. This pattern of taking 'your turn' muddles the group dynamics movement. I feel some of this confusion can be rectified if George and/or I make these feelings known to the group."

In responding to this example I would reinforce the student's awareness of the anti-therapeutic force inherent in "taking turns" and encourage the student to share her feelings more spontaneously and authentically. I would evaluate the clarity of the student's observations and her ability to identify the critical traits of therapeutic forces evident to the group's progress or lack of progress.

Self-Awareness Recognized While Being a Group Member. The student is encouraged to be introspective, to develop the ability and willingness to recognize self-feeling, self-thoughts, and specific behaviors that controlled self-involvement in the group. A student is asked to describe his inner-awarenesses at critical moments throughout the group. The student is also requested to relate recognized feelings to conscious behaviors. The group

experience should help the prospective leader to become increasingly aware of how self-feelings affect his behaviors in a group setting. Through these awarenesses, steps are developed to change anti-therapeutic behaviors while reinforcement is given to recognized and potentially positive therapeutic behaviors. An example taken from a portion of a log follows:

> "I had reconciled myself to begin the session while on my way to class. I had been vacillating each day since the last group. My greatest difficulty was in admitting before the group that I felt this competition with Harry--a difficulty that obviously reflected in my feeble start. At the risk of sounding melodramatic, it was one of the most difficult things I've ever attempted. For me, I had a profound sense of change. It was one of those moments after which one is never quite the same. I went from shame and fear to a sense of pride and peace. I was surprised at the group's reaction. Instead of an air of 'shame,' which I half expected, an air of respect seemed to be generally agreed upon."

In responding to this I would reinforce the student's action, his willingness to explore his inner feelings related to the past group and action taken in the present group. I would also reinforce his recall of the group's reaction to his behavior, letting him know that a counseling group is a relatively safe place to practice new behaviors. I would also reinforce his willingness to be introspective and respect his "deeper" levels of feelings.

Detected Feelings and Behaviors in Other Group Members. The student is expected to cite the empathically-sensed feelings and observed behaviors of other members that are considered to be critical to the group's movement. The student must briefly describe her empathic feelings related to the specific observed behaviors of other group members. Also, the student is required to understand others' impact on herself as a group member and to develop insight into the application of this data were she the leader. An example taken from a portion of a log follows:

> "When Judy opened the group by wanting to read the poem she stressed that it would be good for us, the others in the group; it would help us to open up and self-disclose more easily. I sensed that she was not fully empathic toward us by not really concentrating on how much the poem would benefit us. Her expression to the group about how the poem will help us was a mask to her wanting to say, 'this will help me so let me do it.' I sensed that her acting out as a counselor by reading the poem kept her from openly playing the role of the client. There was a sense of safety and security behind that because she controlled the dynamics of the group. The poem was her vehicle to open up to the group, by having group members ask her the 'how and why' the poem was important to her."

In responding to this I would reinforce recognition of the behavior and basic sensing to what may be underlying the behavior. I would encourage the student to become even more empathically sensitive to the other member.

I would also respond to the student by suggesting how she could have acted upon this understanding more meaningfully during the group or in preparation for the next group.

Means of Enhancing Group Progress. Based upon awareness and knowledge of the other log criteria, the student is requested to give specific suggestions on how he would intervene to have the group function more effectively. In writing this portion of the log, the student assumes the leadership. The student is required to develop the skills of leader interventions by relating to observations and feelings considered critical to the group's movement. An example taken from a portion of a log follows:

> "As a leader I would continue to evoke the 'I--thou' and 'here--now' communication. Judging by the reaction of the members, more group movement seemed to exist by the intimate disclosures of each member. I will not be satisfied with anything less than my experience in this session, and although it probably cannot be perpetually had, it will always be in the back of my mind. It was both anxiety and thrilling release at one and the same time."

In responding to this I would reinforce the recommended intervention as the student related it to observed dynamics, the recognized impact upon other members, the awareness of impact upon self, and the ability to relate the intervention to a specific group occurrence. I would also encourage the student to specify where this intervention is considered to be therapeutic.

Summary

By writing a log for each group experience, the student is required to use recognition and recall skills to assess the importance of behaviors related to effective group movement, to gain insight through introspective thoughts to his or her own involvement as a group member, to be conscious of the uniqueness of other members, and to develop potential leader interventions through relationship to recognized behaviors and sensed feelings. All of this can be accomplished without encouraging each member to be a quasi-leader during the actual group experience. The log writing exercise allows for the development of cognitive skills related to a unique personal growth experience.

I strongly support the concept that counselors-in-training experience personal growth activities, especially activities the student can use upon becoming a counselor. I feel the Ohlsen (1977) model, or a model that has some structured concepts, is an effective means of teaching group procedures while creating an environment for personal growth. The model described in this article increases the opportunity for the counselor-in-training to develop helping skills, group leader intervention skills, idiosyncratic goal identification and assessment skills, and insight into group dynamics skills. The Group Log described herein allows the student to be a member of the group while processing the group for its personal and cognitive values. While writing the log, the student is able to re-experience what transpired in the group and assess it from both a member's and a prospective group leader's frame of reference.

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